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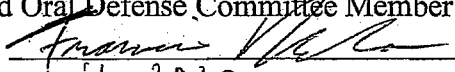
The Importance of a U.S. Security Strategy in the
Caspian Black Sea Region

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Executive Summary

Title: The Importance of a U.S. Security Strategy in the Caspian Black Sea Region

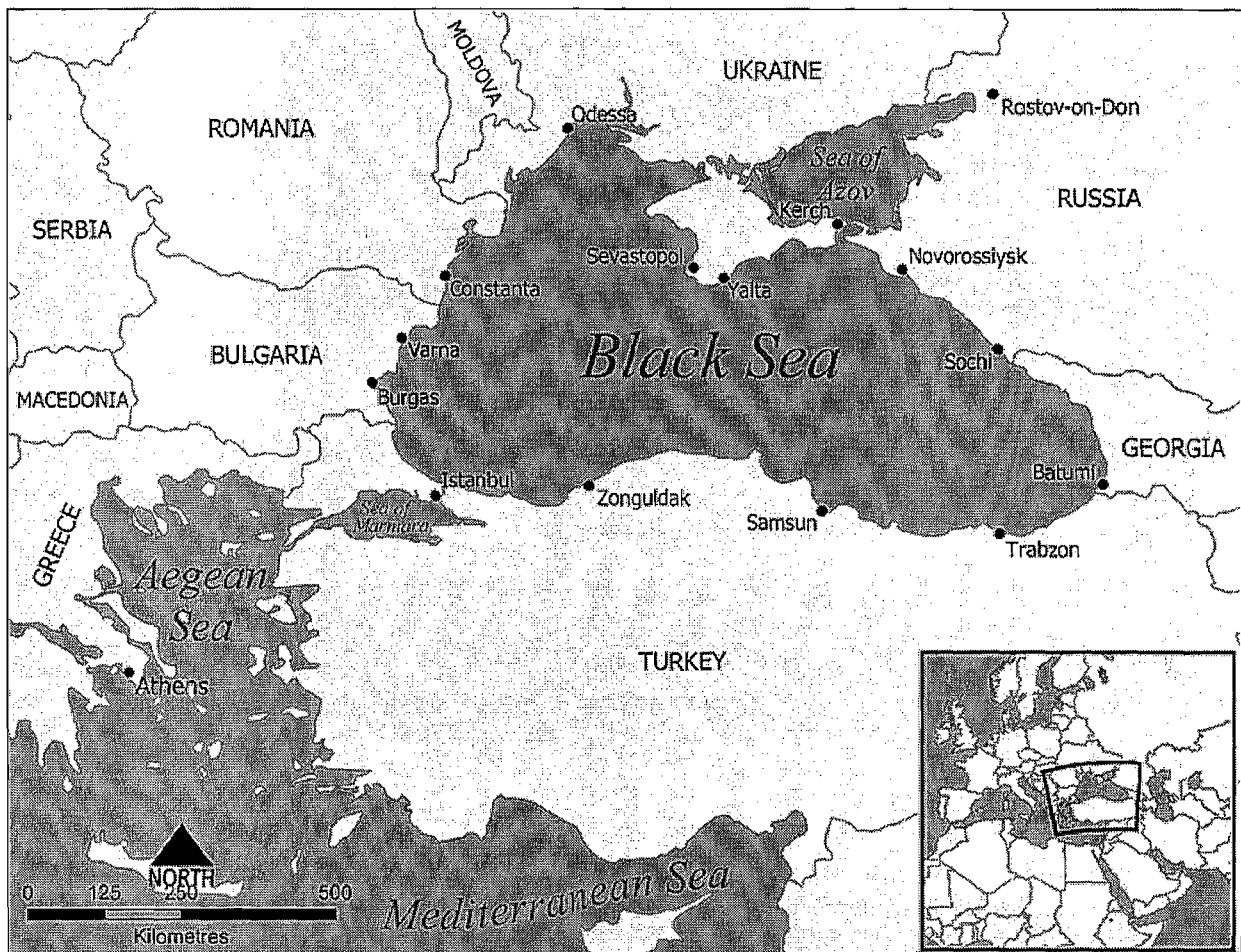
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Thesis: Due to the strategic importance of the Caspian Black Sea Region, the US should create a comprehensive regional strategy that provides for secure energy supplies, reduces criminal activity and serves as a means to counter Russian attempts at regional hegemony.

Discussion: The Caspian Black Sea Region is located at the strategically important intersection of the Balkans, the Middle East, Europe and Asia. It boasts sizable energy reserves and offers considerable opportunities for international commerce. Long left to the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation to provide stability to the region, Washington has neglected to develop a definitive regional security strategy. Since the end of the Cold War, this region has been anything but a scene of peace and tranquility. The Soviet Union's collapse created a security vacuum in the region which the U.S. ignored. The events of September 11, 2001, and more recently the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, exposed seams in American diplomatic and military power in the region and has necessitated a relook at U.S. security policy there. Despite the obvious importance of current U.S. foreign policies in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. also must concentrate on security concerns in the Caspian Black Sea Region as well. The destabilizing threats in this region are numerous and affect energy transportation, criminal enterprise and national sovereignty. Developing a security strategy based on all elements of U.S. national power will provide the pillars of lasting stability required for the region. Utilizing all aspects of DIME in this strategy's design will bolster host nation capacity and encourage cooperation within the region to tackle the myriad of challenges that have served as a flashpoint of hostility and instability.

Conclusion: Energy availability, economic opportunity and security related issues combine to make this region strategically important to a variety of geopolitical actors. The U.S. requires a multifaceted approach due to the complexity of the various security threats posed on the region. To be successful, the U.S. must continue to promote and foster growth and stability within individual countries as well as encourage cooperation throughout the region. The U.S. must prepare these relatively young, independent states to be able to repel common, destabilizing threats, particularly those that could jeopardize energy security and Russian aggression. Ultimately, the U.S. can provide lasting security and stability to the region by leveraging its diplomatic, informational, military, and economic strengths. Shoring up alliances and improving relations is, and will continue to be, critical for crisis response, enhancing strategic stability and assuring U.S. military access to the region for years to come.

Figure 1



Source: Yahoo! Maps and the Black Sea Project

The Black Sea lies between southeastern Europe and Asia Minor. Excluding its northern arm, the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea occupies about 168,500 square miles (436,400 square kilometers). It is connected to the Aegean Sea through the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmara, and the Dardanelles, and has been of critical importance to regional commerce throughout the ages.

This major inland sea is bordered by six countries — Romania and Bulgaria to the west; Ukraine, Russia, and Georgia to the north and east; and Turkey to the south. Additionally, it is impacted by another 10 nations through the five major rivers that empty into the Black Sea, the largest of which is the Danube River.

Figure 2



Source: Yahoo! Maps

The Caspian Sea Region is bounded by northern Iran, southern Russia, western Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and eastern Azerbaijan.

Introduction

The Caspian Black Sea Region (CBSR) has become an extremely important area on the geopolitical map to the United States, Europe and Russia. This area of the world possesses significant energy reserves and serves as a strategic corridor for its transportation. During the Cold War, the region (Figures 1 & 2) was an exclusive military and political buffer zone for the Soviet Union, while also serving as the key bridgehead for a military showdown with NATO. Challenging this region is a growing security vacuum which could threaten the stability and security of all Eurasia. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to conflict and ethnic tension in every corner of the region.¹ The not-so-frozen conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russia and Georgia, and Russia and Chechnya are just a few examples of recent conflicts in the region. In addition to the numerous state conflicts, the CBSR has become a focal point for new and untraditional security concerns, such as energy security, narcotics trafficking, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation and terrorism.²

There are three major actors who have both similar and competing interests in the region: the United States, Western Europe and Russia. The CBSR holds practical importance for the U.S. because of its energy resources, its support for the war on terror and its usefulness as a route for projecting power into Eastern Europe and Central/Western Asia. The Europeans also view this region as an area of significant importance, not only because of the number of threats and the region's proximity to Western Europe, but also because of the region's vast energy resources and its direct impact on the European economy. Finally, the CBSR is vital to Russia, which not only views this area as an extension of itself, but also feels its foreign policies should resonate throughout the region in order to ensure the region continues to serve as a strategic geographic and political buffer to NATO.

Long left to the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation to provide stability to the region, Washington has neglected to develop a definitive CBSR regional security strategy. The events of September 11, 2001, and more recently the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, ought to have resulted in a reexamination of U.S. security policy in the region. The significance of the region to U.S. national security interests, combined with its myriad of destabilizing factors, should be of great concern to policy makers in Washington. Due to this strategic importance of the Caspian Black Sea Region, the US should create a comprehensive regional strategy that provides for secure energy supplies, reduces criminal activity and serves as a means to counter Russian attempts at regional hegemony. In order to be successful, this strategy must promote democratic values and ideals by increasing diplomatic engagement, enhance military capabilities through more partnerships and exercises and focus on improving the region's economic landscape to encourage more foreign investment.

Strategic Importance of the Region

The Caspian Black Sea Region lays at the strategically important intersection of the Balkans, the Middle East, Europe and Asia. For centuries, this area has been under the influence of warring entities and civilizations which has led the area to be in a constant state of flux. The region is full of destabilizing factors such as crime, corruption and conflict, and due to long term domination by foreign powers, common interests among the countries in the region never emerged.³ As a result, these countries never became geopolitical powers, instead looking to other powerful state actors for guidance, protection and resolve.⁴ In addition to its strategic geographic location, the CBSR boasts sizable energy reserves and offers considerable opportunities for international commerce. These seemingly positive characteristics also combine to contribute to regional instability in terms of conflict, crime and other various threats, as a

mixture of state and non-state actors compete to influence these resources and opportunities. As a result of these characteristics, the CBSR becomes strategically important to a multitude of geopolitical actors, particularly to the United States and Europe.

CBSR and Energy

One of the most significant aspects of the region is that it is an important energy resource for the West. The West is becoming increasingly dependent on fossil fuels from the CBSR, and it is becoming imperative to the U.S. and Europe that these energy supplies remain secure, reliable and available to free markets through the use of alternative routes. The extended area provides for approximately 50% of the EU energy requirements with estimates rising to 70% over the next five years.⁵ According to some estimates, this region could hold as much as 35 billion barrels of oil, which would account for about 4% of the world's reserves, while its natural gas reserves could exceed 5,000 billion cubic meters. These are significant amounts of energy for a natural resource-depleted region such as Western Europe. Azerbaijan currently exports about 1 million barrels per day, while Russia exports 4.4 million barrels per day. One third of this oil passes through the Druzhba pipeline and another million barrels through the Black Sea.⁶

Energy security has been especially prominent in shaping strategic perceptions about the Black Sea over the past two decades. The contribution of Caspian and Russian oil and gas to global energy supplies have made the question of energy shipments through and around the Black Sea a matter of high strategic interest for the U.S. and Western Europe. Energy security is a precondition for economic stability, and thus a top priority for the United States and the EU economies. During the Soviet era, all energy transit routes in this region led from the oil and gas fields of the Caspian Sea Region and the Caucasus to the Russian Federation. Russia's long-held

control of the proverbial energy spigot in the region has created a lot of anxiety in Western Europe.

The U.S. and EU economies require reliable and affordable energy that is ideally obtained from multiple suppliers through various supply routes for dependability. To lessen the reliance on Russia for energy, the US and Europe have increasingly looked at Turkey as an alternative conduit for energy, specifically looking at creating and expanding oil and natural gas pipelines running from the Caspian Sea and Caucasus areas to Turkish ports, thereby bypassing Russia altogether. One such conduit is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline that was completed in 2005. The BTC transports oil from Baku, Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea via Tbilisi, Georgia onward to Ceyhan, Turkey, to reach tankers. Another important pipeline is the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline which runs parallel to the BTC and pushes natural gas to Europe.⁷ Additionally, by 2015 the Nabucco gas pipeline will be complete which will allow natural gas from the Caspian Sea region to reach Europe through Romania, Hungary, and Austria and truly lessen the E.U.'s dependency on Russia.⁸ This expansion of supply routes has caused considerable angst between Russia and the West.

The United States and the Region

The CBSR holds practical importance to the U.S. in terms of energy supplies, economic opportunity and projection of power and military access to Eastern Europe and Central/Western Asia. It also plays significant role in any future military plans for countering aggressive Russian behavior. Long ignored by policy makers in Washington, discovery of vast energy supplies in the late 1990's, numerous conflicts and the rise of terrorism, elevated this region's geopolitical importance to the United States.⁹

During the Cold War and early 1990's, the U.S. did not have a definitive security strategy for the region. The U.S. was very unfamiliar with this part of the world, and due to its proximity to Russia, Washington allowed Moscow to govern and influence the region as it deemed appropriate. However, during this time there were several conflicts occurring within the CBSR that Russia either initiated or influenced, and there was rising concern of the spread of Muslim extremism. These issues, coupled with newfound awareness of abundant oil reserves, piqued U.S. interest and forced Washington to consider taking a more proactive role in the region.

The U.S. began to develop a foreign energy policy that supported the development of multiple Caspian energy pipelines in the late 1990's. After the pipelines were developed, the U.S. planned to broaden its policy objectives, focusing on strengthening the independence of the newly formed states, bolstering regional cooperation and enhancing global energy security. However, the events of September 11th put those plans on an indefinite hold.¹⁰

Militarily, apart from a few bilateral exercises, the United States did not have a very active mission in the region, as it was focused on security and stability within the Balkans. Aside from efforts to resolve the Balkan conflict, the most significant U.S. military/diplomatic effort in the entire region was the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP). After the events of 9/11, a very pro-U.S. Georgian government provided the U.S. with an opportunity to gain a foothold in the region. So in 2002, the U.S. invested \$64 million into GTEP in an attempt to enhance Georgian military capabilities with traditional U.S./NATO military equipment and doctrine.¹¹ In terms of U.S. military power projection and access, the CBSR has become very strategic and logistically critical. Since 9/11, countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia have offered use of its airspace to access Afghanistan and Iraq, allowing the U.S. an

unimpeded air corridor from Western Europe and Turkey into the Middle East and Central Asia.¹²

Europe and the Region

Western Europe has long considered the South Caucasus as the wall separating Europe from Asia, and viewed the Black and Caspian Seas as belonging to different worlds.¹³ However, with the E.U. expanding to include Bulgaria and Romania, the frozen conflicts of this region are at the E.U.'s front door. It is because of the instability in the region and its proximity to Western Europe that the CBSR has now become very important to Europeans.

Europe also has important strategic interests in protecting commerce and thwarting illegal activities. In terms of economic and energy supply, the CBSR is a source and transit point for current and future energy resources that could boost Europe's diversity and security of supply. Oil and natural gas from Central Asia and the Middle East transit across this region and out through Black Sea shipping lanes and pipelines towards Europe. These same routes that transport natural resources also serve as a conduit to traffic drugs, weapons, humans, and WMD.¹⁴ The potential of failing and corrupt governments, narcotics and human trafficking, radical extremism and WMD proliferation occurring on the fringes of the European Union provides a sense of worry for Western Europeans.¹⁵ Enhancing stability and the rule of law in this region is crucial to the EU's deeper ambition of spreading stability, prosperity and democratic values on the European continent.

Threats

At the end of the Cold War, security for Europe and the United States focused on military issues and Russia. It was not until after September 11, 2001, that the United States and Western Europe began to see this region as a source of other potential threats to national security. Due to

poorly protected borders, and various overt and covert transit routes to Western Europe, the CBSR is a source of regional and global security threats relating to energy security, drug trafficking, terrorism, illegal arms smuggling and proliferation of WMD components.¹⁶

However, the Russian threat should not be overlooked, as the Russian government continues to fuel instability in the CBSR. These new security threats, combined with increasingly aggressive Russian policies in the region, contribute to long term instability and national security concerns to the United States, its allies and partners.

Crime/Drug/Terrorism Threat

One of the most pressing, but overlooked, issues in the region is drug trafficking. The illicit drug trade has a significant impact on regional security because it threatens the makeup of a society by inflicting addiction, spreading crime and disease, and exacerbating corruption in these states, thereby weakening their ability to function politically and economically.¹⁷ The global drug trade now has ties to insurgency and terrorism and has increasingly become a threat to both regional and international stability, as organized crime is attracted to these areas prone to conflict because of the weakness of central governments and law enforcement capabilities. Ninety percent of all drugs entering Europe go through this region via the Eurasian Corridor, the old “Silk Route”.¹⁸

The Eurasian narcotics trade poses multiple challenges to U.S. goals in the region. For one, the Eurasian drug trade possesses a large corrupting influence over politicians in the region. The weaknesses of local market economies, economic disparities between the rich and poor, and low official salaries of governmental employees combine to produce a high level of corruption. In countries of the Black Sea Region corrupt politicians and representatives of security structures are routinely involved in unlawful activities together with criminals and rich businessmen.¹⁹ One

of the most dramatic threats to the security and stability of the region is posed by organized criminal elements linked with terrorist organizations operating in the region. Additionally, the drug trade in the region is financing terrorist groups that target U.S. forces. Groups such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban all have been, or are, involved in the drug trade to finance their operations.²⁰

Crime and terror groups alike often incorporate the patronage of the same government officials. One such example deals with Georgia. During the tenure of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze from 1995-2003, his cabinet protected criminal groups and even received payments from terrorists. According to a former Minister of State Security, many Georgian cabinet members received significant sums of money from these groups that included such actions as permitting Chechen fighters to cross into and through Georgia in fighting the Russians, and allowing drug and weapons traffickers to cross the borders into and out of Eastern Europe.²¹

A logical progression of financing these terrorist activities is the acquisition of a WMD device within the region. The surplus of nuclear, biological and chemical materials left over from the Cold War in Russia, and the potential demand of these materials from radicals in the Islamic Crescent to the south make these items extremely attractive on the black market. Organized crime groups have expanded their illicit activities in recent years into nuclear material trafficking, and have increasingly used the southern trafficking routes through Turkey, the Caucasus and into Central Asia and the Middle East as proven by approximately forty-one seizures of nuclear material in this area from 1995 to 2000.²² Additionally, there have been at least six or seven interceptions of WMD smuggling in the CBSR since 2001.²³

There is a real possibility that countries of the CBSR could become a direct or indirect source of proliferation of weapons-grade material technology or expertise because many of these governments lack the capability to control exports and borders. An even more ominous picture would be that terrorist groups acquire a WMD device, particularly chemical and biological weapons, for blackmail or to destabilize a country in the region. In early 2005, the FBI asked the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) to identify how terrorists are potentially trying to take advantage of organized crime groups and corruption to obtain fissile material in various regions. In their study of organized crime in the CBSR, researchers found commercial ties in the drug trade between criminal groups in the region and Islamic terror groups. The TraCCC also found rampant corruption in all levels of the regional government and law enforcement mechanisms, rendering portions of the region nearly ungovernable.²⁴

The Russian Threat

The most significant threat to the CBSR is Russia. For Russia, the region is important because it was once part of the Soviet Union, and therefore it is still viewed as an extension of itself. Russian priorities in this region are increasingly focused on maintaining and enforcing its regional hegemony. Moscow views the CBSR as not only a key economic resource and enabler to Moscow's energy conglomerate, but also as a geographic security buffer, and it is willing to go to great lengths to ensure this buffer remains.²⁵ The Russian threat has been highlighted by a multitude of events over the last few years, including its political dominance in the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.), its invasion of Georgia, and its increasingly assertive policy of using energy as a tool to achieve foreign policy goals.

It is likely that Russia will continue to marginalize the foreign policies of the independent states in the region and attempt to prevent the West from increasing its foothold. Russia has seen

to it that it dominates the C.I.S., a regional organization of former Soviet republics that is designed to coordinate trade, finance, law and security in the region. Russia created the C.I.S. as a regional security umbrella, but one under the de facto control of Moscow.²⁶ As Russia continues to dominate the eleven members of this organization, its sphere of influence continues to grow while minimizing any initiatives or desires from the other members.

In order to project military power in the region, Moscow has long considered access to the warm seas of the Black Seas an important factor to its national security, and continues to “lease” former Soviet naval bases in the Ukraine. As a result, Russia is able to maintain a sizeable naval presence in the Caspian Sea.²⁷ Because it considers this region an extension of itself, Russia views the increasing regional military presence of the United States military and NATO since the 9/11 attacks as threatening.²⁸ The GTEP gave Georgia more political clout in the region and greatly improved its Soviet-era military. At the same time, the U.S. was also donating money and providing military training to Azerbaijan to bolster its border security and security for its oil pipelines. There were also talks of permanent U.S. basing in the country.²⁹ Adding to Russia angst about the U.S. in the region was the U.S. approaching Armenia, Russia’s closest ally in the region, to discuss joint military exercises with NATO and the U.S. To combat American overtures to the region, Russia developed a new strategy of its own that has been viewed as increasingly aggressive and threatening to regional stability.

In 2002, Moscow developed a new regional strategy that was based on the premise that all regional problems must be resolved by the Caspian states without external influence from the U.S. or Western Europe. The idea was that Russia should be the only geopolitical power with a legitimate presence in the region. Moscow was determined to prevent NATO countries from establishing a permanent presence in the greater Caucasus area and to limit any newly

independent states' military cooperation with the West.³⁰ In October 2003, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov developed a defense foreign policy doctrine that dramatically changed Russian strategic priorities and military practice. Under this doctrine, Russia identifies one of its top security threats as the expansion of NATO and the introduction of foreign troops without an agreement by Moscow, or authorization by the U.N. Security Council, onto the territories of states which are adjacent to Russia. This doctrine endorses the use of preemptive military force as a way to tackle military threats and allows access to regions of economic importance to Moscow.³¹ This doctrine was written with the United States, and to a lesser degree Europe, in mind due to NATO expansion into Russia's backyard. Of the six Black Sea states, three of them (Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania) are formal members of NATO, while Georgia and the Ukraine have aspirations of joining and want to be accepted into the Membership Action Program (MAP). Russia worries about NATO expansion because, as they have said in the past, "...a powerful military stationed at our borders with no declared objectives poses a threat to any non-NATO country...Sensible leaders should realize this and counter the threat."³² This new, more aggressive security policy first became evident in August 2008.

The Russian invasion and its recognition of the breakaway Georgian republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia sent a shock wave across the European continent and to Washington. Moscow's actions generated new sources of instability in the region and highlighted Russia's resurgence as the dominant player in the area and its displeasure of the U.S. and Europe's policies in the greater CBSR.³³ Not only did Moscow fuel separatist tendencies in South Ossetia, they were rumored to have conducted sabotage activities on the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan energy pipeline, which not only affected Georgia, but affected EU consumption as well.³⁴ These shocking actions by Russia reminded Western policy makers that Moscow was willing to use

military force to achieve its political goals in the region. Moscow's resurgence and desire to be a quasi-empire will continue to be a very real threat to lasting stability in the region.

In regards to energy, Russia has become an energy superpower and is one of the top producers in the world. With its ability to influence the world through energy control, Russia has become more powerful in global politics. Russia is currently the primary supplier of energy for both Western Europe and China.³⁵ Russia supplies more than 70% of Turkish natural gas and 40% of the European Union's.³⁶ In the past few years, the strategic value of Russia's energy control has become clear, and there have been several incidents in which Moscow has used its control of energy supplies as a weapon of influence and intimidation. The Ukrainian gas crises of 2005 and 2008 highlighted the vulnerability of European energy dependence on Russia. In both cases, the Russian gas monopoly Gazprom temporarily suspended gas flows to Ukraine as part of a dispute over gas price increases. Within hours of the shutting off the flow, many European countries, particularly Austria, Italy, Poland, and Germany, reported drops in their own pipeline pressure by as much as 30%.³⁷ These incidents not only indicate the strategic dangers of Europe's growing energy dependence, but also highlight an increasingly assertive Russian policy of using energy as a soft weapon to maintain regional dominance. Finally, Gazprom's efforts to achieve increasing control over both energy distribution systems in Europe and energy production facilities in Central Asia, while increasingly shutting Western companies out of Russian energy developments, highlight the measures Moscow is willing to take to maintain its power and control over energy in Europe.

U.S. Strategy Recommendations

It should be obvious that the Caspian Black Sea Region has become a strategically significant region to the U.S., but as late as August 2008, the region still did not capture the sincere attention

of American leadership. Particularly, Russia's invasion of Georgia exposed gaping seams in the U.S.'s twenty-year assumption that no country in Europe or Eurasia was threatened with invasion by another.³⁸ It was this flawed premise that contributed to the U.S. not having a security strategy for the region.

In order to reverse this course, the U.S. must define its overarching security objectives in the region and focus on developing independent, stable and democratic states that are able to integrate into global economic and security environments. The ultimate goal of this strategy should be to enhance regional cooperation in order to allow for a more shared effort in the mitigation of threats to the region. Collectively attacking these problems not only promotes goodwill among the countries, but brings lasting security and stability to the region. However, it is imperative for the United States to remain mindful of Moscow when developing the various aspects of this strategy. Russia has been and always will be both a critical player and threat in the region, whose interests and influence must be considered, and in some regards respected, when formulating regional foreign policy. Therefore, developing a viable security strategy will not be possible if the United States does not work with Russia on securing at least some common security interests, such as transnational terrorism and WMD proliferation.

To accomplish this feat, Washington must use all elements of its national power to create, implement and manage its regional security strategy. Applying the diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME) strengths of the United States government in the creation and execution of this plan is the most effective means to promote state cooperation and bring enduring security and stability to the region.

Diplomacy

Since the U.S. has never put a lot of emphasis on its foreign policy in the CBSR, it must now commit itself to being diplomatically engaged in this region. To reach the objectives of this security strategy, the United States' diplomatic corps must actively promote and correctly communicate its foreign policy for the region. The U.S. must also work with various established organizations that are already present in the region to bolster energy security and reduce criminal threats. To counter Russian hegemony, Washington must work political channels to promote democracy by encouraging the expansion of NATO and the European Union, while strengthening and improving relationships with members of the region. Concurrently, the State Department must continue direct engagement with Russia to reduce Moscow's suspicions of U.S. intentions in the region and to encourage collaborative efforts in eliminating common threats.

To bolster energy security and mitigate criminal threats, it is crucial for the United States to engage, utilize and cooperate with the various existing regional organizations. Organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Economic Cooperation Organization of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM), and the Council of Europe, offer an excellent opportunity for the United States to understand the region better and ensure its policies coincide with the needs of the CBSR. The U.S. needs to become more involved with these organizations. By building upon these existing organizations, processes and initiatives for regional security can be locally developed rather than being misperceived by the citizens of the region as something imposed by Washington. To better confront the growing criminal threats to the region, the State Department, in conjunction with the Department of Justice, should encourage more regional countries to join

the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI). This organization is designed to facilitate the integration of law enforcement and customs of 13 nations in southeast Europe. Currently only four CBSR states (Moldova, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania) are members of the SECI.³⁹ The SECI is extremely useful in coordinating law enforcement intelligence among member countries, as well as coordinating a broader police network to thwart crime. Since SECI does not include all of the CBSR countries, the United States must exercise more influence in this endeavor to increase regional participation and membership. In addition to encouraging membership, the U.S. can assist this organization by applying its law enforcement, customs, and intelligence capabilities to assist in addressing the security challenges of border control, terrorism, trafficking and WMD proliferation. By having a better law enforcement coordination venue, port-to-port security and border control will improve, drastically reducing these threats.

To counter Russian hegemony, the United States must continue to build new regional relationships while improving existing ones. Building key relationships in order to enhance partner capacity will enhance the United States' flexibility to create enduring relationships that empower these regional nations to address common threats. In particular, the U.S. needs to maximize its relatively new and warm relationships with Bulgaria and Romania, who have some influence in the region and want to be providers of security and stability to NATO. Additionally, it is imperative that the U.S. maintains its long-standing ties with Turkey, but since the beginning of the Operation Iraqi Freedom relations with Ankara and Washington have been somewhat cold. Turkey's concern with its tumultuous Kurdish population within its borders and the United States' close ties with the Iraqi Kurds have strained relations. Washington must remember that Turkey is a vital NATO ally and allows the U.S. a strategic presence into the region via its airbase at Incirlik. It must do better in maintaining positive public relationships with Ankara

while continuing to work closely with the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (TNI) in countering terrorism, particularly Muslim extremism in the region.⁴⁰ A recommendation to improve these relations is for the U.S. to encourage the E.U. to accept Turkey as a member. It has been over ten years since Turkey applied for E.U. membership and the time to include them is now. Turkey is very influential in the region, both economically and militarily, and must be seen as a CBSR power. Ankara can serve as a very stabilizing factor to the region for Western Europe, and it may feel compelled to take more of a leadership role to manage the regional threats should it be admitted to the E.U.

Additionally, the United States must promote democracy in this region by using OGA's and NGO's to promote fair elections and other democratic ideals that will assist in shaping effective U.S. policies in the region. The U.S. must continue to focus on developing these fragile states within the CSBR to ensure they remain pro-Western, in order to allow the United States to conduct overseas contingency operations against terrorism. It is important to realize that Washington will never have total unimpeded access to the entire region; however, it will be critical for the U.S. to maintain a legitimate presence in such as areas as Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania.

U.S. diplomats must continue to promote NATO expansion, albeit delicately. Moscow is determined to prevent NATO countries from establishing a permanent presence in the region and it discourages members of the CIS from cooperating with the U.S. and NATO. It is critical to the success of this strategy that diplomats articulate the stabilizing aspects of a NATO membership and presence in the region.⁴¹ Georgia and Azerbaijan should be the next two countries to be considered as both have contributed significant numbers of their armed forces in support of combat operations in Iraq. The U.S. should also consider coordinating its foreign

policy for the CBSR, when appropriate, with that of the E.U. The European Neighborhood Policy is one such area where Washington can gain support on its CBSR policies by reinforcing the work the E.U. has been doing in the region. This policy assists developing countries in the region who one day hope to join the European Union. Diplomatically, the U.S. could use this venue as a means of providing political, economic, human rights, legal reform and other assistance to those countries in the greater Black Sea region to help the region remain secure and stable.

Finally, diplomats should be cognizant of creating foreign policies in the region without regard to Russian interests. The U.S. must continue to engage with Russia, and cooperate on issues that are important and beneficial to both countries. While the U.S. must be cautious of antagonizing Russia in the region, it must not be intimidated by Russian pressure. The U.S. and Russia can make great strides in combating criminal trafficking, WMD proliferation and combating terrorism in the region if they choose to do so. As previously stated, Russia has long felt that control of this region is imperative in order to influence energy supplies/transportation, control extremism and maintain a security buffer zone from NATO. Russia has considered U.S. policies and actions in the region as somewhat imperialistic, as seen with its close ties to NATO ally Turkey and U.S. military bases in Bulgaria and Romania. U.S. policy makers must be cognizant of this perception and publicly brush aside notions of any imperialistic desires in the region.⁴²

Information

To leverage its informational power, the U.S. needs a strategic communication plan that not only promotes the objective of this strategy promoting regional cooperation, but is also aimed at listening to and consulting with the leaders of the region to better understand their priorities and concerns. In order to have positive and lasting results, the U.S. must develop appropriate

informational themes and messages for the CBSR and use effective media to convey this strategy.

It is imperative that the themes and messages used in this plan do not insinuate that the U.S. is trying to dominate the region or merely use it for strategic positioning of its military forces. Rather, the message must be one that promotes cooperation to meet regional challenges and threats. A recommended theme for this plan is, *“The United States is helping countries within the Caspian Black Sea Region help themselves”*. This IO plan must make use of all military, governmental and civilian information capabilities that enable national-level exploitation and dominance over the information environment in the CBSR. There are a variety of venues the U.S. can use to advance its message to the region and promote the regional security strategy.

The United States European Command (EUCOM) can promote the strategic message by sponsoring annual Caspian Black Sea Region security conferences. These types of forums will allow CBSR military leaders to gather and listen to what the U.S. military is doing for the countries in the region to promote security and stability. To bolster cooperation, these conferences can also be used as an opportunity to bolster personal and professional relationships. The George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies in Garmisch, Germany, possesses many programs and activities that can be used not only as an educational opportunity, but also as a strategic communications platform to discuss concerns and garner support to reduce regional threats. Finally, the U.S. should continue to utilize television, radio, and social networks to get its strategic message out. Utilizing U.S.-funded international broadcasting services, such as Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe, to transmit uncensored news and information to audiences should be continued to promote U.S. interests in the region.

Military

A U.S. military presence (permanent or otherwise) enhances regional security and marginalizes Russia's influence in the region. Due to the CBSR's geostrategic importance and the multiple threats in this region to U.S. national interests, the U.S. military needs to play a very important role in the development and execution of this security strategy. Largely, this area will fall under the purview of the United States European Command in Stuttgart, Germany. The Department of Defense must develop a supporting plan to this regional strategy that engages allies and partners in building capacity to counter existing regional threats and prevents emerging ones. The goal should be to build key relationships that support U.S. interests in the region that enhances partner's capabilities for self defense and coalition operations, and provides for essential peacetime contingency access and en route infrastructure. In order to ensure security for energy infrastructure and reduce criminal/terrorist threats, the U.S. military should focus on improving host nation security capacity by increasing bilateral/multilateral exercises and improving the education, training and equipment these countries receive. Lastly, the U.S. military must expand its staff that is focused on the CSBR, and assist partners in developing operational programs and plans that enable the host nations to counter these common threats in the region to include Russian aggression.

The most effective means of building relationships, and improving security capacity and interoperability in the region is to increase the number of U.S.-led military exercises. Exercises familiarize partners with NATO and U.S. doctrine and tactics, and they also promote commitment and cooperation among the region's various military and civilian leadership. While EUCOM currently has six exercises planned for the region that pertain to either NATO directly, or NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), this number is simply not enough.⁴³ Expanding to ten

exercises per year will allow for more regional participation and serve to deepen defense and military cooperation between the U.S., NATO, and PfP partners. By developing regional cooperation through PfP, the U.S. will be able to more easily facilitate its access to bases and over flight rights in the prosecution of campaigns such as OEF. Already, several PfP nations have provided basing, force protection at bases, and personnel to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Through these exercises, Caspian and Black Sea states can become familiar with U.S. forces, methodologies and leadership. Without these pre-established relationships, support for U.S. operations would be harder to secure and incorporate. Increased exercises build habitual relationships and trust, and provide the framework that is imperative for the theater security strategy to work. To defer costs, Warsaw Initiative Funds can fund partner participation in these additional NATO/PfP exercises.

The U.S. military must focus on training and equipping programs in order to build capacity throughout the region, much as it did with Georgia and the GTEP. This training will enhance interoperability, improve intelligence cooperation and information sharing, and develop host nation capabilities that will strengthen and stabilize a country internally. The GTEP was very successful in improving the Georgian military capability, and the U.S. benefited by having a Georgian infantry battalion in a continual rotation of service in Iraq. In-country defense advisory assistance missions such as GTEP must be expanded to include other nations in the region such as Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Armenia. Providing modern equipment and current tactics, techniques and procedures will assist these nations in improving not only internal security and border control, but will build capabilities for other operations such as UN Peacekeeping missions. An expanded U.S. National Guard state partnership program with specific countries in the region can manage these programs.

The U.S. military should also focus on increasing education and professional development for military officers and NCOs in the region, and increase current seat quotas to allow more nations in this region to attend resident U.S. PME schools. Within Europe, the U.S. military must continue to maximize the presence of the Marshall Center to educate and harmonize various viewpoints affecting security cooperation in the region. The Marshall Center provides a range of resident and non-resident security educational programs that are essential to the U.S. and EUCOM's effort to enhance the security sector capacity of our Allies and partners. Using this resource to develop partner capabilities for democratic governance, combating terrorism, conducting stability operations and homeland defense is vital for success.

The U.S. military can also meet many of these training requirements by maximizing the opportunities provided by the recent establishment of Joint Task Force East (JTF East). Joint Task Force East is a EUCOM initiative executed by U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) designed to strengthen relationships between the United States and its Eastern European allies. This program can be an innovative element of a theater security cooperation program as it focuses on enhancing partner capacity and fostering regional cooperation. JTF East provides the U.S. and its partners in Romania and Bulgaria with training facilities and an integrated combined staff that facilitates combined training and joint planning.⁴⁴ However, EUCOM must put forth a greater effort in advertising the significant training benefits to various countries within the region.

Most importantly, the Defense Department should focus the majority of its effort towards developing these CBSR countries' military capabilities towards those regional threats they can mitigate or eliminate themselves (individually or regionally). Particular focus in this area should be given to airspace and maritime intervention, counter terrorism and intelligence sharing in cases of criminal activity, terrorist attacks or threats to energy in the region.

Because so many of the energy and criminal/terrorism threats in this region are connected to the maritime regions, both the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy have a significant role to play in developing and executing the security cooperation strategy. Maritime security is extremely important in both the Black and Caspian Seas to ensure free flow of commerce and to counter terrorism or criminal threats. While the Black Sea does have the Black Sea Border Coordination and Information Center (BSBCI) to coordinate the six coast guards of the Black Sea, its information sharing capability is currently not tied into NATO maritime surveillance programs.⁴⁵ Until NATO expansion, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard can provide training opportunities that not only improve the tactics, techniques and procedures of these coast guards, but assists them in adopting information sharing capabilities on the maritime threats in the region.

For counterterrorism (CT) issues, increased special operations training is already occurring in the region, led by the U.S. Special Operations Command. These initiatives must be continued and improved upon to allow host nation CT forces to tailor their mission essential tasks. Common CT training can include hostage rescue, WMD device disarming and containment procedures and various other direct action missions. Finally, terrorist intelligence and information sharing among these governments and militaries are not common, as the old Soviet mentality of controlling information, even among allies, remains strong throughout the region.⁴⁶ The U.S. military's intelligence and antiterrorism communities must encourage rapid information dissemination among the various countries in the region in order to thwart real-time threat streams. Many of these counter terrorism and intelligence initiatives can be funded through existing funding lines such as the Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Funds, Counter Terrorism Fellowship Funding or other various forms of foreign military financing.

Countering Russian Military aggression by any member within the CBSR would be futile and costly as the Georgians will admit. Once partners in the region have reached an acceptable level of military competency, the U.S. military should assist in developing operational programs and plans to combat these threats, including future attempts of Russian military aggression in the region. While Russia's invasion of Georgia highlights the fact that no country in this region can stand alone against Russian military action, it does not mean that they should not have an organized and collective defense. The U.S. can assist in developing operational plans for these countries to provide some form of organized defense, and if the U.S. decides to establish security guarantees with these countries, either bilaterally or through NATO, then these countries should be informed and trained to how they will militarily fit into the U.S. or NATO operational plan.

In order to accomplish this goal, it is imperative that EUCOM increase the size and importance of its Caspian and Black Sea regional desk officer positions, as well as its Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODC) in these countries. Currently at EUCOM Headquarters, there is only one action officer whose primary job is to oversee a CBSR country, and that is Turkey. Additionally, the desk officers in Stuttgart assigned CBSR countries are given that task as a collateral duty only, with their primary mission being a desk officer for a Western European nation. There is also little emphasis at EUCOM in managing the ODC's in the CBSR. Besides Turkey, where the Ankara ODC office is large and headed by a U.S. two-star general, the remaining ODC offices in the region are very small with an average size of three people and led by a Major or Lieutenant Colonel. Without DOD emphasis in improving the size and the importance of ODC missions, military personnel who see these jobs as non-career enhancing will avoid these billets.

Economically

Due to its geographical location, the CBSR is an attractive destination for both trade and investment. However, the U.S. must not lose sight of the fact that Russia is and will continue to be the region's most important economic player as well. The population in the region is highly dependent on Russia for migrant employment, energy subsidies and other low cost, Russian-made goods.⁴⁷ This region represents a huge market of over 350 million people with a foreign trade capacity of over 300 billion US dollars annually.⁴⁸ While not forgetting the region's close economic ties with Russia, the U.S. must provide more economic assistance to these states and increase its involvement with regional economic organizations as the CBSR countries experiment with more free market economies. A stronger regional economy significantly stabilizes an area and helps to mitigate criminal threats by having dependable employment with prevailing wages. It also lessens many of the regional countries' dependence on Russia.

To bring lasting economic stability, the area requires more foreign investment, modern technology and efficient business management practices to bring the region in line with Western economic and business standards. It also will require labor force training to tap into the important human capital of this region. A well-trained but inexpensive labor force will be a very attractive opportunity to foreign firms looking to establish presence in this region, and provide legitimate job opportunities for the workforce in the region.

To lessen the region's dependency on Russia, the U.S. must also consider expanding its bilateral trade agreements, and promoting economic packages that provide job creation and investment opportunities for countries and corporations outside the region who desire to do business in the CBSR. In order to meet this objective, the U.S. government should work more closely with the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), to establish business

ventures and encourage trade that promotes economic growth in the region. Although the U.S. maintains an observer status with the BSEC, it has yet to display much involvement or support to the economic interests and opportunities in the region. A strong economic region is a pillar for a stabilized area and this will make many of these states more attractive for eventual EU and/or NATO membership.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Long ignored, the time is now for the U.S. to develop a regional security strategy in the Caspian Black Sea Region. Energy availability, economic opportunity and security issues combine to make this region strategically important to the United States.

The development of this strategy requires a multifaceted approach due to the complexity of various security threats in this region. To be successful, the U.S. must use all elements of its national power to development democratic ideals, foster economic growth, and improve military capacity within individual countries while encouraging regional cooperation. The U.S. must correctly communicate its message that strong, independent functioning states that can cooperate together to meet challenges is the key for lasting regional security and stability. The U.S. must prepare these relatively young, independent states to repel a variety of common destabilizing threats, particularly energy availability, criminal enterprise, and terrorism. Additionally, Washington can also counter Moscow's aggressive, imperial tendencies towards the region by encouraging outside foreign investments and through unilateral U.S. security guarantees or through NATO membership.

Preventing and combating new and emerging threats could be challenging if regional cooperation and engagement with the United States is not made the priority. Ultimately, the U.S. can provide lasting security and stability to the region by applying its informational, military,

political and economic might to give many of these CBSR governments the time necessary to develop and reform their own military, political and economic systems. Shoring up these alliances and improving relations is, and will continue to be, critical for crisis response, enhancing strategic stability, and assuring U.S. military access to the region and points beyond for years to come.

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